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# Against Intentionalism

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## Abstract

Intentionalism is the claim that the phenomenological properties of a perceptual experience supervene on its intentional properties. The paper presents a counterexample to this claim, one that concerns visual grouping phenomenology. I argue that this example is superior to superficially similar examples involving grouping phenomenology offered by Peacocke (1983), because the standard intentionalist responses to Peacocke's examples cannot be extended to mine. If Intentionalism fails, it is impossible to reduce the phenomenology of an experience to its content.

## 1 Introduction

When we look at the world, we have visual experiences. Two important features of these experiences are their phenomenology and their content. The phenomenology of an experience is what it is like to have it; its content is how the experience represents the world as being. INTENTIONALISM is an influential theory about how these two features are related. The view says, roughly, that phenomenology supervenes on content, so that any two experiences that differ in their phenomenology differ in their content. Refinements will be introduced shortly.

Interest in Intentionalism derives, at least in part, from the role it can play in a reductive project in the philosophy of mind. We may well be able to explain the *content* of mental states in naturalistically acceptable terms.<sup>1</sup> If the phenomenol-

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<sup>1</sup>For example, by giving a causal co-variation account of content, as in Fodor (1994) or Stalnaker (1984).

ogy and content of experience are as intimately related as Intentionalism says, we may also be able to reduce phenomenology to content and thus make it naturalistically acceptable. Indeed, this is the use to which Tye (1995) and (2000) want to put Intentionalism. But if Intentionalism fails, that reductive project fails, as well. That is not to say that phenomenology is completely irreducible. For all I say, we are still free to reduce phenomenology to physical or functional properties.

In this paper, I present a counterexample to (a refined version of) INTENTIONALISM. My counterexample is not the first; over the last few years, several have been proposed. One that is often thought to be the strongest appeals to the possibility of inverted spectra. Putative cases of inverted spectra are cases in which two experiences have the same color content but different color phenomenology, hence presenting a counterexample to INTENTIONALISM.<sup>2</sup> However, standard arguments about inverted spectra rely on substantive and controversial theories of both the phenomenology and content of experience—and though these are widely held, they are substantive theories.<sup>3</sup> Such cases also interact in complex ways with theories of color properties themselves, for instance, whether the space of color

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<sup>2</sup>Ned Block considers this sort of case decisive (see e.g. Block (1996)); see also Chalmers (2004). For a putative case of actual spectrum-inversion, see Nida-Rümelin (1996).

<sup>3</sup>Which controversial claims they rely on depends on how we spell out the case. There are two major variants. In the first, we consider two subjects, Vert and Nonvert who are functionally identical. They are looking at a particular red object. The proponent of spectrum inversion submits that their experiences have the same content but different phenomenal character. This requires first that the content of an experience is determined independently of the phenomenal character of that experience, perhaps by what usually causes experiences of that type. It also requires that we can compare the phenomenal character of experiences across subjects. The first is challenged by, e.g., Siewert (1998), the second by Stalnaker (2003).

In the second variant, we consider a single subject in two different situations. The first situation is an ordinary one: she is looking at a ripe tomato. She then undergoes some physiological change which leaves her spectrum-inverted. For example, she wakes up one morning and says that all of a sudden, the sky looks yellow, *et cetera*. Nothing in her environment has changed. Perhaps on this morning, her experience misrepresents her environment. The proponent of spectrum inversion submits that after a period of adjustment, her experience once again veridically represents the colors of things. The subject once again says that the sky looks blue, grass green, etc. This requires that the content of experience can change over time in the way required by the argument, as well as that the comparison of qualia in a single subject over time is unproblematic. Again, the first claim is a controversial claim about how the content of experience is fixed; the second turns out to be false. That even the intra-personal case over time is at least problematic is brought out by Shoemaker (1982); see also Harman (1999), Stalnaker (2003). These theorists differ on whether the problems can be overcome. For a very thorough discussion of inverted qualia, see Byrne (Summer 2005).

properties is symmetrical in the way presupposed by the argument.

In contrast to discussions of inverted spectra, my case against INTENTIONALISM focuses on a very simple counterexample involving no substantive theories of intentionality. The case I am concerned with involves quite ordinary visual experiences all readers will have had—at least by the time they have read this paper. In the course of the paper, I'll argue that my proposed counterexample is superior to the ones presented by Peacocke (1983) because it is immune to standard intentionalist responses.<sup>4</sup>

After some preliminaries (section 2), I present my proposed counterexample (section 3). I then argue that it is indeed a counterexample (section 4).

## 2 Content, Phenomenology, Intentionalism

### 2.1 *The Content of Experience*

To say that a state has content is to say that the state represents the world as being some way. As such, the state either represents the world veridically or falsidically. It is an assumption of the debate I am addressing that visual experiences have content. Moreover, it is an assumption that there is such a thing as *the* content of experience, i.e., that there is a unique way a given experience represents the world as being.<sup>5</sup> By a content property, I shall mean the property of having such-and-such content.

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<sup>4</sup>One case I will not discuss in detail is the duck-rabbit. Two successive experiences of seeing it as a duck and as a rabbit, respectively, differ in their phenomenology. But there is also an obvious representational difference: in the one case, the experience represents that the lines and dots depict a duck, in the other that they depict a rabbit. Peacocke himself dismisses the example on these grounds (see Peacocke, 1983, p.17).

<sup>5</sup>Many theorists who otherwise disagree share the assumption that experiences have representational content, such as Heck (2000), McDowell (1994), Peacocke (1992), Evans (1982), Searle (1983), Stalnaker (1998), Thau (2002), Tye (1995, 2000), Byrne (2001). Some theorists who deny that experiences have content are sense-datum theorists who believe that the sense-data are not themselves contents, such as Russell (1912/77). For a recent denial, see Travis (2004).

## 2.2 *The Phenomenal Character of Experience*

When a subject has a perceptual experience, she is in a phenomenally impressive state. The feature of the experience that makes it thus impressive is the phenomenal character of the experience. By a phenomenal property I shall mean the property of having such-and-such phenomenal character.

## 2.3 *Intentionalism*

In this paper, I will mean by INTENTIONALISM the claim:

[INTENTIONALISM] Necessarily, for a single perceiver, and restricted to visual perception, if two experiences of this perceiver differ in their phenomenal character, they differ in their content.

As I have formulated it, INTENTIONALISM is a relatively weak claim, and it is defended by several theorists.<sup>6</sup> It is merely the claim that one set of properties supervenes on another. Stronger versions are also defended sometimes. There are two principal ways of strengthening INTENTIONALISM. First, we can lift the restriction to a single perceiver and to visual perception, claiming instead that across perceivers (and/or across modalities), the phenomenal character of two experiences cannot vary without a difference in their respective contents. Second, we can require a different relation than mere supervenience between the phenomenal and content properties of an experience. We might require, for example, that the property of having phenomenal character *C* is *identical to* the property of having the content that *p*, for particular *C*'s and *p*'s. The weak version will do for my purposes. If I can show that it fails, any stronger version that entails it will also be refuted.

INTENTIONALISM as I have formulated it is compatible with functionalism. In fact, a theorist who accepts INTENTIONALISM can appeal to functional differences between the deliverances of vision and audition to explain the difference in the

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<sup>6</sup>See for example Byrne (2001), Dretske (1995), Harman (1999), Lycan (1996), Thau (2002), Tye (1995), and (2000).

phenomenal character of visual and auditory experiences that have the same content. She might also appeal to such functional differences to explain the difference between seeing and believing, since at least non-occurrent beliefs do not have *any* associated phenomenology.<sup>7</sup>

At this point, it is important to distinguish between two versions of INTENTIONALISM. Let REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM be INTENTIONALISM with the restriction that one must be able to understand the contents of experience independently of the phenomenal properties of experience. Let NON-REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM be INTENTIONALISM without any such restriction.<sup>8</sup> I need to say a bit more about what NON-REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM is and what it is not.

One might hold that one cannot understand what the content properties of an experience are independently of its phenomenal properties on the following grounds. We need to distinguish the contents of experience from other contentful states of the agent, such as states of the visual system. A promising line of thought holds that a state is an experiential state only if it has some phenomenal property. So in order to identify the contents of experience, we need to have recourse to the phenomenal properties of experience. On my understanding, holding this view *does not* bar a theorist from also holding REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM.

Rather, a non-reductive intentionalist holds that we cannot understand the content properties of an experience independently of its phenomenal properties on the following grounds. Even if we take for granted which contentful states are experiential states, we still need to appeal to the phenomenal properties of experience to explain what their contents are. That might be the case, for example, because the

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<sup>7</sup>Thus, Tye (2000, p.62) appeals to a property he calls 'being poised' to explain the difference between a state with the content that *p* that has an associated phenomenology, and one with the same content but without phenomenology. The former, but not the latter state, is "poised" to have an impact on beliefs and desires. And as Tye says, the property of being poised is "essentially a functional role one" (Tye (2000, p. 62)). Incidentally, this make Tye's claim mysterious that the property of having a particular phenomenal character *just is* the property of having a particular content, since in addition to having a certain representational content, it is also required that the contentful state occupy a certain functional role.

<sup>8</sup>I follow Chalmers (2004) in drawing this distinction. Paradigmatically, Shoemaker in Shoemaker (1994a) and (1994b) defends non-reductive INTENTIONALISM, since on Shoemaker's view, some of the properties represented in experience are defined in terms of the phenomenal character they are associated with.

content of an experience includes that it has such-and-such phenomenal character.

The distinction between REDUCTIVE and NON-REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM is important for two reasons. One concerns the reductive project I mentioned in the introduction. Only REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM can serve in that project. If REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM fails, we cannot reduce phenomenal properties to content properties.

The other reason the distinction between REDUCTIVE and NON-REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM is important concerns the strategy of this paper. A defender of NON-REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM might try to establish it by making the following two claims:

- (1) For any phenomenal character  $C$  an experience can have, the contents of that experience can include the proposition that the experience has  $C$ .<sup>9</sup>
- (2) An experience has phenomenal character  $C$  if and only if its content includes the proposition that it has  $C$ .

If (1) and (2) are true, then there cannot be a difference in the phenomenal character of an experience without a difference in content, since phenomenal character determines (some) content; hence, a difference in phenomenal character entails a difference in content. Should one wish to defend INTENTIONALISM using (1) and (2), it would still be a substantial claim, since (1) and (2) are substantial assumptions about experience. But one cannot argue against INTENTIONALISM by counterexample, given (1) and (2).<sup>10</sup> So my argument cannot, by itself, work against INTENTIONALISM thus defended. I take it that it at least works against REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM, and for simplicity, I restrict myself to that claim. In what follows, I will mean REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM by INTENTIONALISM.

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<sup>9</sup>Presumably, not all propositions can be represented in experience, such as the proposition that the number 2 is even. The restriction to phenomenal characters that *an experience can have* is intended to ensure that visual experiences need only represent that they have visual phenomenal character, and likewise for the other modalities.

<sup>10</sup>As Byrne (2001, p. 212) rightly points out, if (1) and (2) are true, even the existence of mental paint is compatible with NON-REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM. For mental paint, see Block (1996).

### 3 The Counterexample

Consider Figure 1. As you look at it, you can become aware of different groupings of tiles. Depending on how you look at Figure 1, you can see various sets of squares as prominent.

Let me number the squares as in Figure 2.

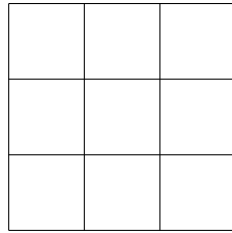


Figure 1: Tiles

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 |

Figure 2: Numbered Tiles

In Figure 1, you can see the squares corresponding to 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 as prominent, or you can see 2, 4, 6, and 8 as prominent. You may also be able to see other groupings as relatively more prominent, such as 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8, which form a ‘T’. Consider two successive viewings of Figure 1. Suppose that you see one grouping of tiles during the first viewing, a different grouping during the second. You can have these different experiences without changing where you look. For instance, you can continue to focus your vision on the center of Figure 1 and still have the different experiences. Let me fix on one particular pair of experiences and name them:

[E<sub>1</sub>] You are looking at Figure 1, and you see the corner and center tiles (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) as prominent.

[E<sub>2</sub>] You are looking at Figure 1, and you see the four tiles in the middle of each side (2, 4, 6, 8) as prominent.

I will argue that E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>2</sub> are a counterexample to INTENTIONALISM: they form a pair of experiences that are had by the same perceiver, are both visual perceptions, have the same content, but differ in their phenomenology. That E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>2</sub>



differ in their visual phenomenology seems clear enough. To be sure, ‘visual phenomenology’ is a term of art, and perhaps the intentionalist could deny that the introspectible difference between the experiences is a difference in their phenomenal properties. For the purposes of this paper, I’ll rest with our intuition that the difference is in the phenomenal properties.

## 4 Same Content

My argument for the claim that  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  have the same content consists of two parts. I will successively argue for these claims:

[PW] The contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  do not diverge in truth-value in any possible world.

[SAMENESS] There is no further difference between the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ .

It follows that  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  have the same content. Splitting the argument up in this way allows me to separate two kinds of responses on behalf of INTENTIONALISM: those that deny the first part, and those that deny the second.

### 4.1 *Arguing for PW*

Any given content determines a set of possible worlds: the set of worlds in which the content is true. This follows simply from the claim that if a state has content, it represents the world as being a certain way, and hence can represent it veridically or falsidically. Further, everyone will agree that it is sufficient for two contents to be distinct that they disagree in truth-value with respect to some possible world.<sup>11</sup> In this section, I will argue that this sufficient condition for the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  to be distinct is not met. Now, merely arguing for PW is insufficient to establish that the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are the same, since we might individuate contents more finely than by sets of possible worlds. In that case, we could have a distinction between the contents of the two states without there being any world in which they

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<sup>11</sup>Thus, the arguments I consider are independent of any commitment to possible worlds semantics, either for content-bearing states in general or experiential states in particular.

diverge in truth-value. SAMENESS rules out this possibility, and I will argue for it in the next section.

My strategy for defending PW is to consider some ways of denying it and to show that none of them are compelling. I follow this strategy, because I think it is intuitively plausible that the two experiences represent the world as being the same way.<sup>12</sup> So it seems best to proceed by considering attempts to articulate such a difference, and see how they fare.

**First Proposal** The proponent of INTENTIONALISM might start by pointing to the feature of grouping itself. On this proposal,  $E_1$  represents the squares as grouped one way, while  $E_2$  represents them as grouped another way. Depending on what the property of being grouped amounts to, their extensions may not diverge in any possible world. So right now, this is just a redescription of the problem.

In response, the proponent of INTENTIONALISM might describe the difference between the two experiences—their grouping phenomenology—in terms of prominence: in  $E_1$ , certain squares are prominent, in  $E_2$  others. This leaves open whether the property of being prominent is a dispositional or a relational property. Suppose that being prominent is a dispositional property. That is, being prominent is the property of tending to appear prominent to creatures with our particular visual systems when they are in the sort of state that gives rise to the prominence effect. If that is the right way to understand the dispositional reading of being prominent, then the property that the first grouping (1, 3, 5, 7, and 9) has does not diverge in any possible world from the dispositional property the second grouping (2, 4, 6, and 8) has. For all that is required in order for a group of squares to have either

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<sup>12</sup>Incidentally, Wittgenstein seems to hold the same position. In considering the duck-rabbit, he says that we are torn between two descriptions of what has gone on: on the one hand, you might describe the change as a change in the way the world appears; on the other, you might describe the change as occurring in the face of an unchanging world. He considers an interlocutor who says: “But surely you would say that the picture is altogether different now!”. To this Wittgenstein responds: “But what is different: my impression? my point of view?—Can I say? I *describe* the alteration like a perception; quite as if the object had altered before my eyes.” (Wittgenstein (1953, Part II, xi)) Wittgenstein says that it is as if the object *had* altered, though he does not endorse that description either. Rather, he goes on to say, “the expression of a change in aspect is the expression of a *new* perception and at the same time of the perception’s being unchanged.” (*ibid.*) On Wittgenstein’s view, it is not clear where to locate the difference between the two experiences.

dispositional property is for it to be arranged as the squares are in Figure 1. The properties the intentionalist points to do not diverge in any possible world. This proposal is also subject to the criticism I urge against the next one.

Suppose instead that we take the property of being prominent as a relational property.  $E_1$  represents Figure 1 as having the relational property of being such that squares 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 look prominent to the subject of  $E_1$ ;  $E_2$  represents Figure 1 as having the relational property of being such that squares 2, 4, 6, and 8 look prominent to the subject of the experience. On this view, the two properties clearly diverge in some possible world. The actual world is one such world at a time at which you look at the squares and one grouping (say 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9) seems prominent. At that time, these five squares have the relational property of seeming prominent to you, while the other squares do not have the relational property of seeming prominent to you at that time. That is the case because one of the relata is an experience with a certain phenomenology, to wit, the phenomenology of  $E_1$ .

Whether this is a good defense of INTENTIONALISM depends on whether looking prominent is anything other than an experience's having a certain kind of phenomenal character. If it is not, then we cannot understand the property the experience's content represents independently of the phenomenal character properties of the experience. And in that case, the defender of INTENTIONALISM can only defend NON-REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM by making this argument. In order to defend REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM, one would have to show that the content at issue can be understood independently of the phenomenal character of experience. Clearly, the same problem plagues the dispositional property proposal from two paragraphs ago. In order to defend REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM, the dispositional property had better not just be that of being disposed to give rise to this phenomenology.

So this strategy by itself does not work. We might think of the subsequent proposals as proposals about what the content at issue is.

**Second Proposal** The defender of INTENTIONALISM could try this. When a set of squares appears grouped together, that is in virtue of their appearing to have some other feature in common. Such a feature might be that the lines of the squares

that are prominent are thicker, or the lines of the squares that are not prominent slightly blurrier. In that case, the contents of the two experiences diverge. Suppose, for example, that the lines of the squares the subject is not attending to are somewhat fuzzier. Then it is compatible with  $E_1$  that the lines making up square 2 are fuzzy, while this is not compatible with  $E_2$ .

The tricky part of this proposal is to implement it in more detail, because the prominent squares and the non-prominent ones share their lines. For example, in  $E_2$ , squares 2, 4, 6, and 8 are prominent. If being prominent is a matter of the lines of the square having a certain feature, then the center square 5 should also be prominent, since it shares all of its borders with prominent squares, and so all of the lines making up square 5 have the prominent-making feature. So no proposal that seeks to locate a representational difference between the experience in how the lines are represented will work.

**Third Proposal** The intentionalist might focus on the squares, rather than the lines, by likening the difference between  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  to more common cases of visual illusion. The most promising version of this approach is to claim that  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  give different illusions of three-dimensionality. In each case, the prominent grouping of squares visually appears slightly closer to the perceiver than the other squares. These illusions have different contents.

But this proposal will not do, because of general features of depth perception. If two objects subtend the same angle in a perceiver's visual field and one object appears closer than the other, the apparently closer one also appears smaller.<sup>13</sup> But in the case of the more prominent squares, we do not observe a difference in apparent size. The prominent and non-prominent squares have the same apparent size. That strongly suggests that the squares do not appear to be at different distances.

Here we have one reason why my proposed counter-example is more forceful than ones previously proposed, such as the Necker cube.<sup>14</sup> While the Necker cube can be handled by appeal to differences in the apparent distance from the perceiver,

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<sup>13</sup>See Palmer (1999, pp. 315-8). Palmer offers some striking examples: see especially the figure on p. 316.

<sup>14</sup>See e.g., Peacocke (1983, p. 16).

mine cannot.

**Fourth Proposal** The intentionalist can try to argue more indirectly. There is a large body of empirical work on the effects of attention on what a subject sees.<sup>15</sup> If a subject attends to a particular feature of her visual field, such as a cross displayed on a computer screen, she may fail to notice other easily visible features of that field, such as a small square displayed in the immediate vicinity of the cross. Following Mack and Rock (1998), we can call this phenomenon *inattentional blindness*. Furthermore, it seems apt to describe the difference between  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  by saying that we are attending to a different group of squares. This suggests that a subject who attends to one grouping of squares, such as 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, may exhibit a similar bit of inattentional blindness: she may fail, for example, to notice small changes in the squares she is not attending to, though she would notice the same changes were they to occur in the squares she is attending to.

The proponent of INTENTIONALISM might try to parlay these sorts of findings into an argument that the two experiences differ in their contents. First, she will make the following observations about what a subject is and is not inattentionally blind to. When the subject is in  $E_1$ , she is attending to one set of squares. She will therefore be inattentionally blind to small changes in the other squares. For the sake of definiteness, let this blindness be that she will not notice if a small black circle appears in square 2. When the subject is in  $E_2$ , she is attending to another set of squares, including square 2. Now, she *will* notice if a small black circle appears in that square. The defender of INTENTIONALISM argues that from these observations, it follows that the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are distinct. Since the subject *would not* notice the appearance of a circle in square 2 while she is in  $E_1$ , the truth of the content of  $E_1$  *is* compatible with the presence of the black circle; but since she *would* notice the appearance of a circle in square 2 while she is in  $E_2$ , the truth of the content of  $E_2$  *is not* compatible with the presence of the black circle. Hence, the truth-conditions of the two contents diverge with respect to worlds in which there is a black circle in square 2.

However, the claims about content do not follow from the claims about what

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<sup>15</sup>See for example Mack and Rock (1998).

the subject is and is not inattentionally blind to. To make this point, just assume for the sake of argument that the subject would not notice the appearance of a small black circle in square 2 while she is in  $E_1$ —i.e., while she experiences 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 as prominent. Suppose that the subject is in  $E_1$ , the black circle appears in square 2, and the subject does not notice it. In that case, the subject's experience does not veridically represent the world. Instead the experience misrepresents the world as containing nine *empty* squares. After all, it is not as if the experience is silent on whether there is a black circle in square 2. Therefore, even if the facts about inattentional blindness are as the proponent of INTENTIONALISM supposes them to be,  $E_1$  is not compatible with the presence of the black circle in square 2. Hence, the content of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  do not diverge.

**Conclusion** I conclude that PW holds. Certainly, logical space has room for further proposals. But the ones I have considered seem to be the most compelling. This makes a strong case for PW.

#### 4.2 *Arguing for SAMENESS*

So far, I have argued that the two experiences do not diverge with respect to their possible worlds content. This is not enough to show that their contents do not diverge *simpliciter*. To make this point, I need to argue that there is no further difference between the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ , i.e., SAMENESS. In this section, I consider three arguments against this claim and reject them. They address the main alternative conceptions of content extant in the literature: Fregean, Russellian, and centered worlds. One upshot of this discussion is that in general, we need to already know that two content-bearing objects have different contents before we argue about how to individuate these contents, i.e., before we argue about Russellian or Fregean or possible worlds contents. I shall emphasize this point for the special case of experience.

**Fregean Contents of Experience** Frege famously held that even when two sentences have a content that is true in all the same possible worlds, we still need to

distinguish these contents.<sup>16</sup> His proposal consisted of two distinguishable parts: a criterion for when two contentful sentences have the same content, and a proposal about what sorts of abstract objects we should use to characterize the identity conditions of the contents of sentences.

The first argument I consider tries to generalize Frege's criterion for when sentences have different contents to experiences.<sup>17</sup> It then goes on to argue that, by this criterion, the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are distinct. For the purposes of this discussion, the second part of Frege's proposal is irrelevant. Since what matters for this paper is only whether the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  differ, it does not matter how to individuate them *if* they differ.

Crucially, in order for the criterion for different content-bearing objects to have distinct contents to be helpful in the current dialectic, it must be such that we can judge of two experiences whether they have the same content or not, independently of having already decided the issue. I shall suggest that the most promising line of extending the Fregean strategy to experience fails on just this count.

Let me begin with Frege's original criterion for sentences. Suppose we are given two sentences, such as "Hesperus is Phosphorus" and "Hesperus is Hesperus". It seems clear that a thinker can accept the latter without accepting the former while being fully rational and understanding the sentences. Whenever this is the case, we should conclude that the two sentences express different contents. This is Frege's criterion as applied to sentences. That is, whenever we have a pair of sentences that differ in their acceptability to a rational thinker who understands them, the sentences differ in their content. The appeal to a *rational* thinker is essential. To see this, note that an active sentence and its trivial passive transformation, such as "John killed Bill" and "Bill was killed by John" can differ in their acceptability to some speakers, such as speakers who do not know English very well, or who are distracted, or apathetic. But that does not show that the two sentences differ in their content. The speakers for whom they differ in acceptability are simply irrelevant

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<sup>16</sup>Frege (1997).

<sup>17</sup>Thus, Peacocke (2001) argues that experiences have Fregean contents, although they are not the same as the contents of thought. That is why, on Peacocke's view, it is still true that perception has a nonconceptual content. I believe that this constitutes a change in position from the one Peacocke defends in Peacocke (1992), which I mention below.

for the purposes of this test.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of rational acceptability does not apply straightforwardly to experiences, so the defender of INTENTIONALISM needs to generalize the criterion. She might do so as follows:

[FREGE] Whenever two experiences differ in which beliefs it is rational to form on their basis, they have different contents.

FREGE incorporates the requirement that the thinkers we are considering be rational, since not just any beliefs we form on the basis of an experience will count as relevant.

With FREGE, the defender of INTENTIONALISM can argue that  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  differ in which beliefs it is rational to form on their basis, and hence that they differ in their contents. For example, while  $E_1$  makes it rational to believe that the squares 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are grouped together,  $E_2$  makes rational the distinct belief that the squares 2, 4, 6, and 8 are grouped together. Therefore, the two experiences make it rational to form different beliefs, and hence have different contents. So they cannot be counterexamples to INTENTIONALISM.

Unfortunately, FREGE is too strong. Suppose we have two experiences that differ only in their phenomenal character. Clearly, one of these experiences makes it rational to believe that what it is like to have it is like *this*, while the other makes it rational to believe that what it is like to have it is like *that*. For this reason, we need to restrict the applicability of FREGE to only certain beliefs we form on the basis of a given experience: those we form based on the content of that experience. But we are trying to decide whether the difference between  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  is a difference in content, and hence appeal to FREGE gets us no further along. Hence, arguing that we can tell that  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  have different contents based on the different beliefs they make it rational to form on their basis does not move the debate along. We need a further argument that the difference between  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  is a difference in content.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>This restriction to rational acceptability, rather than acceptability *simpliciter*, is not controversial. It is endorsed by such contemporary Fregeans as Peacocke (1992) and Evans (1982).

<sup>19</sup>An anonymous reviewer suggested the following alternative. Two experiences differ in their



**Russellian Contents of Experience** The proponent of INTENTIONALISM might suggest that the contents of experience are Russellian propositions.<sup>20</sup> Russellian propositions are ordered tuples of objects and properties, rather than senses, and thus impose different identity conditions on contents.<sup>21</sup> In the foregoing discussion of Fregeanism, I distinguished two aspects of Frege’s position: a criterion for when two contentful objects have different contents, and a proposal how best to individuate contents, given the data the criterion delivers. Defenders of Russellian propositions provide an alternative to the second part of the proposal, how best to systematize our data about when two contentful objects have the same or different content. Crucially, they usually do not offer an independent criterion—to replace FREGE—for when two content-bearing objects have the same content.<sup>22</sup>

For example, in arguing that experience has Russellian propositions as content, Peacocke (1992) just assumes that two experiences have different contents, and then suggests that Russellian propositions offer the best means to capture this difference. His argument concerns the difference between two experiences one might have in viewing Figure 3. One can either view it as a diamond, or as a square on its tip.

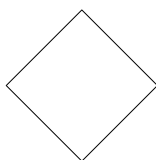


Figure 3: Diamond

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content just in case a rational thinker can believe that the world is the way it is represented by the one experience but not believe that the world is the way it is represented by the other experience. The problem with this proposal is the same as the one I raise in the text. It is precisely up for grabs whether the experiences make different beliefs about the world rational.

<sup>20</sup>This is the view Peacocke defends in Peacocke (1992, chp. 3). He calls Russellian propositions *protopositions*.

<sup>21</sup>They need not contain objects. Existentially quantified sentences may also express Russellian propositions, even though they do not contain any objects.

<sup>22</sup>If they offer one at all, it usually is no different from FREGE, although defenders of Russellian propositions may differ on just which pairs of sentences come out as having different contents by that criterion. I take it that this is one of the issues between Fregeans and Russellians about proper names. The former, but not the latter, claim that one can accept, say, “Hesperus is Hesperus” without accepting “Hesperus is Phosphorus”.

Regarding the difference between these two experiences, Peacocke says this.

Intuitively, the difference between perceiving something as a square and perceiving it as a (regular) diamond is in part a difference in the way in which symmetries are perceived. When something is perceived as a diamond, the perceived symmetry is a symmetry about the bisectors of its angles. When something is perceived as a square, the perceived symmetry is a symmetry about the bisectors of its sides. [...] how do we capture the nature of the additional content that distinguishes a case in which we not only have veridical perception of a symmetrical region but also have that symmetry perceived?

[...] I suggest that perceptual experience has a second layer of [...] content. [...] These additional contents I call *protopositions*.<sup>23</sup>

As Peacocke says explicitly in this passage, it is an *intuitively given* premise that the difference between perceiving figure 3 as a diamond and perceiving it as a square is a difference in the content of the respective experiences. The only question that is actually argued is how to capture this difference. So it is just an assumption of the argument that the difference in experiencing Figure 3 as a diamond and experiencing it as a square is a difference in content.

That means that considering Russellian contents of experience as opposed to Fregean ones is a red herring. We do not need different kinds of content, we need different arguments for countenancing a difference in the contents of the two experiences  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ . But since Russellians do not have different criteria for when two content-bearing objects have different contents, the proponent of INTENTIONALISM gains nothing by claiming that the contents of experience are Russellian propositions.

Of course, the defender of INTENTIONALISM could say that, just as it is intuitive in the case of Figure 3 that there is a difference in the content of the two relevant experiences, so it is also intuitive that there is a difference in the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ , respectively. Two things should be said about this move. First, I am

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<sup>23</sup>Peacocke (1992, pp. 76-7), emphasis in the original. Tye (2005) endorses the same solution.

suspicious of an unalloyed appeal to intuitions about such semi-technical notions as representational content.

Second, defending Russellianism about the contents of experience is just half the battle for the intentionalist. She also has to show that there are suitable properties available that distinguish  $E_1$  from  $E_2$ . As I've already said above (section 4.1), some properties will fail the constraints of REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM: the intentionalist needs to find properties that we can understand suitably independently of the phenomenal contrast we are trying to account for.

To bring out the force of this point, it will be useful to distinguish my proposed counter-example from one that seems quite similar. Consider Figure 4, another example urged by Peacocke (1983).

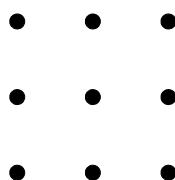


Figure 4: Dots

There is a phenomenal difference between seeing the dots grouped in rows and seeing them as grouped in columns. Proponents of the view that there is a representational difference between the two experiences have appealed to Russellian contents of experience.<sup>24</sup> When we see the dots grouped as rows, we attribute the property to the array of being made up of three rows of three dots each. When we see the dots grouped as columns, we attribute the property of being made up of three columns of three dots each. According to the Russellian the properties are distinct—though they are necessarily coextensive—and hence we have different Russellian propositions. Moreover, these properties can be understood suitably independently of the phenomenal contrast to be accounted for.

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<sup>24</sup>See for example Peacocke (1992).

A similar treatment of my proposed counter-example would look like this.  $E_1$  attributes the property of being made up of five squares arranged as 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are, surrounded by four squares arranged as 2, 4, 6, and 8 are.  $E_2$  attributes the property of being made up of four squares as 2, 4, 6, and 8 are, surrounded by five squares arranged as 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are. But the properties attributed here are the very same properties, and hence even on the Russellian view of propositions,  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  have the same content. Some *further* property needs to be attributed by  $E_1$  but not  $E_2$ . The most natural one is that in  $E_1$ , the five squares are prominent. But that is just our original problem.

A different proposal appeals to different properties. The problem derives from the fact that even when the five squares 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are prominent, the experience still represents the other four non-prominent squares. The last proposal sought to account for that fact by attributing the content that there are four squares surrounding the five, and that led to disaster. But we can account for the representation of the four squares differently. According to this proposal, when the five squares seem prominent, the experience has the following content: there is a large square (the one containing the nine smaller ones) containing five squares arranged as 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are. The four non-prominent squares are simply formed by the outlines of the large square and the five prominent ones. The content of the second experience is then that there is a large square containing four squares arranged as 2, 4, 6, and 8 are. These two experiences have contents characterized by different Russellian propositions.

However, even by the lights of the Russellian, these propositions *mischaracterize* the content of the two experiences. Presumably, the general principle for attributing contents to experiences the Russellian deploys is that an experience represents a property just in case that property is prominent. Thus, in the case of the columns and rows of dots, the experience represents that there are three rows just in case the three rows are prominent. Likewise, the experience represents that there are five squares just in case the five squares are prominent. And crucially, the experience represents that there is a large square just in case the large square is prominent. But neither in  $E_1$  nor in  $E_2$  is the outline of the large square prominent as a whole. That means that the experience does not represent that there is a single

large square. And as I've just argued, that is a non-negotiable part of the proposal, since without representing the large square, the experience does not represent that there are four squares, either.

That shows that my proposed counter-example is immune from a standard intentionalist response to a superficially similar case. Both might be described as exhibiting grouping phenomena, but they are importantly different. Whereas a Russellian treatment is promising in one case, it is not promising in mine.

**Centered Worlds** A different argument against SAMENESS begins by observing that perceptual content is perspectival. It makes a difference to perceptual experience where the subject of the experience is in the world. We need to capture this fact in the content of perceptual experience, because depending on how exactly the experience represents the spatial relations between subject and object makes a difference to how the subject acts. One might think that for this reason, there can be a difference in the content of two experiences without there being a difference in the truth-value of these experiences with respect to any possible world.<sup>25</sup>

However, this is an unnecessary complication. If there is a difference in content between  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  with respect to sets of centered possible worlds, that must be because there is a difference with respect to some centered worlds that does not consist merely in the position of the center. By hypothesis, the two experiences  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  do not differ with respect to who has them, with respect to the spatial relations of the perceiver and the figure, nor with respect to the orientation of that perceiver. But then, there is a difference in the centered-worlds-content of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  only if there also is a difference in the possible-worlds content of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ . So we cannot show that SAMENESS fails simply by pointing out that the contents of experience ought to be individuated in terms of centered worlds rather than uncentered possible worlds.

In making this argument, I tacitly assumed that two centers of a world are the same if they pick out the same agent, that agent is oriented in the same way, and that agent stands in the same spatial relations to what she sees. The reason that these features of the center are the ones that identify the center is that these

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<sup>25</sup>See Lewis (1983).

are features that are plausibly represented in experience. And as a definitional matter about centered-worlds content, the state represents the center as having *all* of the features that go into individuating that center. Nonetheless, on purely formal grounds, these identity conditions on centers are only one option among many. Another option important in this discussion is this. Two centers are the same only if the agents at the centers have experiences with the same phenomenology. On this view,  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  would have different centered worlds contents, since they would differ in their center. Intuitively, on this proposal,  $E_1$  tells the agent that she is in a world in which she has a certain phenomenology, and  $E_2$  tells her that she has a different phenomenology.<sup>26</sup> This proposal runs afoul of the requirements of REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM, because we pick out the content of experience by its phenomenal character, and hence cannot understand that content independently of its phenomenal character.

So instead of picking out the center of the centered worlds by the phenomenal character of her experiences, the defender of INTENTIONALISM could pick out the center by some non-phenomenal property on which the phenomenal properties supervene, such as physical or functional properties. This would allow the defender of INTENTIONALISM to remain with REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM and to have a difference in the contents of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ .

There are two things to say about this proposal. First, it is a substantial claim about the contents of experience that experiences represent these kinds of physical or functional properties. It certainly seems odd to think that it looks to us as if we have the physical properties that some phenomenal property supervenes on. Second, it is not clear that this is a good move for the intentionalist given the project she is trying to carry out. If she wants to give some reductive account of phenomenal properties, and she already assumes that phenomenology supervenes on physical or functional properties, I cannot quite see what further work INTENTIONALISM does for her. In this case, INTENTIONALISM seems to lose much of its attraction.

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<sup>26</sup>This is just a different formal representation of the idea I discussed in section 4.1, when I discussed the proposal that the experiences represent relations between the agent and what she is looking at. The dialectic here is parallel to the earlier discussion.

**Conclusion** I conclude that SAMENESS holds, as well. As in the case of PW, logical space has room for further proposals. But the ones I have considered seem to be the most compelling. With PW and SAMENESS in hand,  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  constitute a counterexample to REDUCTIVE INTENTIONALISM, one that does not succumb to the usual intentionalist responses. Hence, the reductive program that seeks to reduce phenomenal properties to content properties fails as well. Other naturalizing properties may yet succeed.

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